

sity both from the point of view of the investigator and from the point of view of the increasing multitude of readers that channels of publication should increase. Few of these channels have a more definite function to perform than the American Microscopical Society. Whether it is efficient in performing that function those who read its pages are alone able to tell. Its co-laborer, the GAZETTE, will be the last I am sure to discourage it in its mission.—W. W. ROWLEE, *Cornell University*.

#### Nature of the binary name.

In the January issue of the GAZETTE Professor Bailey has urged against the essential permanency of the specific name an argument of so much originality as to be worthy of careful consideration. He presented the same idea some five years since,<sup>1</sup> and I remember then regarding it as an argument needing to be answered; yet I do not recall having read anywhere a word of comment upon it. The gist of the Professor's argument lies in these two interrogations: "Is nomenclature monomial or binomial? Is *bullata* or *Carex bullata* the name of a sedge?" The two forms of expression are, of course, but the abstract and the concrete, respectively, of one thought. In other words, the query is but one; and its strength as an argument resides in the perfect confidence with which a certain one of two conceivable answers is expected. The propounder of this forceful question appears firmly to believe that any and every botanist gifted with ordinary human intelligence must answer: "*Carex bullata* undoubtedly, and not merely *bullata*, is the name of a certain sedge." If this be, what Professor Bailey so confidently believes it, the only rational answer; if it be the correct answer, the argument is strong enough utterly to discredit the practice of treating the retention of the earliest specific name as obligatory under the law of priority.

But, if what the author of the argument deems rationally out of the question be not only possible but defensible; if the affirmative answer to one of the questions does not necessarily involve the negation of the other; if both *bullata* and *Carex bullata* are names of a certain sedge, then the argument, so specious at first glance, is weakened, if not invalidated. And I shall venture to assert, having in mind the continual practice of all botanists, that, under certain limitations, *bullata* alone is the entirely sufficient name of a sedge. Professor Bailey will not dissent from such a proposition as this, that he could lecture for an hour, or for five hours, upon a certain group of sedges, discussing, the while, any number of species from a half-dozen to several hundreds, without any chance of indefiniteness or ambiguity as to the plants, and all this without using any but the specific names; never once, by any necessity of the situation, employing before his hearers the generic term *Carex*. Nor is this instance merely a supposititious one; precisely this usage being so exceedingly common that any botanist, at least upon a moment's reflection, must realize the universal prevalence of it. We do not, as a rule, make extensive use of anything but the specific names, in oral converse, no matter what the genus under consideration may be, unless it should be a monotypic one, in which

<sup>1</sup>BOT. GAZETTE 16: 215.

case we as universally ignore the specific name, making the generic the mononomic appellation of the species. What botanist, having occasion to speak of monotypes, like *Calypso* or *Arethusa* for example, employs the full binary name? There is no need of it; and, in an age less formal and pedantic than ours, no specific name would be assigned to monotypes, even in books and catalogues. The thing is wholly useless; at best a sort of rhetorical flourish appended to that simple term—that “monomial,” to use, but not to approve a word so constructed—which usage makes the essential name of that species of plant. The name is even perfectly competent to distinguish that plant from all others; and so, in this instance we have a well warranted answer to Professor Bailey’s question quite unlike any he deemed possible; a name of one term which is perfectly competent, and every way sufficient, to answer every demand but that of pedantry.

But, however extensively used the specific name as mononomic may be, we can never say of this that it is the name by which a species may be absolutely distinguished from all other species of plants. So much must certainly be conceded to Professor Bailey. Nevertheless, it seems to me that he must feel himself compelled to admit that it has been just this extremely common oral treatment of the specific name as *the name* of a species which has led to the widely prevalent practice of retaining the first specific name under whatever genus; a practice which many have contended for as obligatory under the principle of priority, and which the most eminent and scholarly botanists of all ages have adhered to. Let me insist also upon this; that, in looking for fundamental principles, we are forced to make inquiry into oral usages; for these are everywhere anterior to written usages, and may have much to teach us.—EDW. L. GREENE, *Washington, D. C.*